

Campylobacteriosis

What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is a bacterial infection that affects the intestinal tract and, rarely, the bloodstream. It is probably the most common cause of bacterial diarrhea in New York state. Most cases are seen in the summer months and occur as single cases. Outbreaks are uncommon.

Is this a new disease?

No. Campylobacteriosis has probably been in existence for many years but has only recently been recognized as a common infection as a result of improved laboratory methods.

Who gets campylobacteriosis?

Anyone can get campylobacter infection.

How is the germ spread?

Campylobacter germs are generally spread by consumption of contaminated food or water and, occasionally, by contact with infected people or animals.

What are the symptoms of campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis may cause mild or severe diarrhea, often with fever and traces of blood in the stool.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The symptoms generally appear two to five days after the exposure.

Where are the campylobacter germs found?

Many animals including swine, cattle, dogs and birds (particularly poultry) carry the germ in their intestines. These sources in turn may contaminate meat products (particularly poultry), water supplies, milk and other items in the food chain.

For how long can a person carry the campylobacter germ?

Generally, infected people will continue to pass the germ in their feces for a few days to a week or more. Certain antibiotics may shorten the carrier phase.

Do infected people need to be isolated or excluded from school or work?

Since the organism is passed in the feces, only people with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel habits (infants and young children for example) should be isolated. Most infected people may return to work or school when their stools become formed provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits. Food handlers, children in day care and health care workers must obtain the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities.

What is the treatment for campylobacteriosis?

Most people infected with campylobacter will recover on their own or require fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or to shorten the carrier phase, which may be important for food handlers, children in day care and health care workers. Since relapses occasionally occur, some physicians might treat mild cases with antibiotics to prevent a recurrence of symptoms.

How can campylobacteriosis be prevented?

1. Always treat raw poultry, beef and pork as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly:
 - Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
 - Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding at room temperature.
 - Cutting boards and counters used for preparation should be washed immediately after use to prevent cross contamination with other foods.
 - Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats.
 - Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached particularly when using a microwave.
2. Avoid eating raw eggs or undercooking foods containing raw eggs.
3. Avoid using raw milk.
4. Encourage careful hand washing before and after food preparation.
5. Make sure children, particularly those who handle pets, wash their hands carefully.

Revised: May 2004